

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1217

INFO AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH

AMEMBASSY SAIGON

AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

SECDEF WASHDC IMMEDIATE

DIA WASHDC IMMEDIATE

CINCPAC HONOLULU

USSAG NAKHON PHANOM THAI

S E C R E T BANGKOK 3520

LIMDIS

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

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SUBJECT: SENI CABINET'S VIEWS ON U.S. MILITARY PRESENCE

REF: A. BANGKOK 2794; B. BANGKOK 3119; C. FBIS BK271157Z

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SUMMARY:

SOME OPPOSITION PARTY LEADERS AND THE THAI PRESS HAVE SHARPLY CRITICIZED THE SENI CABINET'S POSITION ON U.S. TROOPS WITHDRAWALS. THESE AND OTHER PRESSURES HAVE RESULTED IN A GOVERNMENT POLICY DECLARATION THAT ALL U.S. TROOPS SHOULD BE WITHDRAWN WITHIN 18 MONTHS. THIS DEVELOPMENT POSES TWO DILEMMAS: A MAJOR ONE FOR OUR MILITARY POSTURE

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IN INDOCHINA, AND THE POSSIBILITY THAT WE WILL RECEIVE THE

BLAME SHOULD SENI FAIL TO WIN CONFIRMATION MARCH 6 OR SHOULD HIS GOVERNMENT LAST ONLY A FEW MONTHS. THE RATIONALE WOULD BE WE GOT RID OF HIM BECAUSE OF HIS STAND ON THE U.S. MILITARY PRESENCE:. END SUMMARY.

1. IN A LATE DEVELOPMENT SURIN MATSADIT, MINISTER ATTACHED TO THE PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE, TOLD NEWSMEN INFORMALLY MARCH 3 THAT THE SENI GOVERNMENT'S POLICY WILL CALL FOR A TOTAL WITHDRAWAL OF AMERICAN TROOPS WITHIN 18 MONTHS. IN AN EARLIER PRESS STATEMENT MARCH 3, FOREIGN MINISTER PHICHAIRATTAKUN SAID THE SENI GOVERNMENT HAD SET A DEFINITE DATE FOR THE WITHDRAWAL OF U.S. FORCES, BUT HE DECLINED TO SPECIFY THE DATE.

2. SUPREME COMMAND CHIEF OF STAFF GEN. KRIANGSAK CHAMANAN TOLD US MARCH 2, FOLLOWING A BRIEFING FOR THE SENI CABINET ON THE U.S. MILITARY PRESENCE, THAT THE GOVERNMENT'S POLICY STATEMENT ON U.S. FORCES WOULD BE "ALL RIGHT". SENI WOULD SAY THAT U.S. FORCES SHOULD LEAVE THAILAND "QUICKLY", BUT WOULD SET NO FIRM DATES AND WOULD KEY THE TIMING OF THE U.S. DEPARTURE TO THAILAND'S NATIONAL SECURITY INTERESTS. KRIANGSAK'S INTERPRETATION NOW SEEMS INCORRECT.

3. DR. SANO UNAKUN, HEAD OF THE NATIONAL ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT BOARD, MET WITH SEVERAL USOM OFFICIALS FEBRUARY 28. SANO SUGGESTED TO THE USOM DEPUTY DIRECTOR THAT THEY BEGIN JOINT PLANNING FOR TOTAL AMERICAN MILITARY WITHDRAWAL, CONCENTRATING ON THE THAI USE OF VACATED BASES THAT AMERICAN FORCES ARE CURRENTLY TENANTING. SANO WAS PARTICULARLY INTERESTED IN SATTAPHI, BUT CLEARLY INCLUDED ALL OTHER BASES AS WELL. WHEN PRESSED FOR A TIME FRAME, SANO SAID WITHIN SIX TO NINE MONTHS.

4. REFS A AND B REPORT THE PUBLICLY STATED VIEWS OF PRIME MINISTER SENI PRAMOT AND DEFENSE MINISTER THAWIT SENIWONG NA AYUTTHAYA ON THE U.S. MILITARY PRESENCE IN THAILAND. LEADERS OF SOME OTHER POLITICAL PARTIES AND THE THAI PRESS CRITICIZED THE SENI CABINET'S POSITION BECAUSE IT DID NOT SET A DEFINITE TIMETABLE FOR THE WITHDRAWAL OF FOREIGN TROOPS FROM THAILAND.

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5. SOCIALIST PARTY LEADER SOMKHIT SISANGKHOM CRITICIZED DEMOCRAT FOREIGN MINISTER PHICHAIRATTAKUN FOR SAYING THAT THAILAND MUST TAKE INTO CONSIDERATION THE SITUATION INSIDE AND OUTSIDE THE COUNTRY BEFORE ANY WITHDRAWAL CAN BE MADE. SOMKHIT SAID: " WE WANT ALL FOREIGN TROOPS, NO MATTER WHAT NATIONALITY, TO BE WITHDRAWN FROM THAILAND WITHIN A LIMITED TIME--MAYBE SIX MONTHS OR A YEAR, BUT NOT TWO

OR THREE YEARS, WHICH IS TOO LONG A TIME. THE TROOPS SHOULD BE WITHDRAWN WITHIN A YEAR AT THE MOST, AND IF POSSIBLE, THEY SHOULD BE WITHDRAWN WITHIN SIX MONTHS." (REF C).

6. IN A RADIO INTERVIEW BROADCAST FEBRUARY 28, THAI NATION PARTY LEADER PRAMAN ADIREKSAN SAID HE FAVORS THE WITHDRAWAL OF FOREIGN TROOPS FROM THAILAND BUT BELIEVES THE RTG SHOULD GIVE THEM TIME TO PREPARE FOR THEIR DEPARTURE. HE SAID THAT IN HIS VIEW ONE YEAR IS A MOST SUITABLE PERIOD OF PREPARATION FOR THE WITHDRAWAL OF ALL FOREIGN TROOPS.(REF D). "THE NATION" OF FEBRUARY 25 QUOTES THAI NATION SECRETARY-GENERAL CHATCHAI CHUNHAWAN AS SAYING: "I THINK THE AMERICAN SOLDIERS SHOULD BE TOTALLY PULLED OUT OF THAILAND WITHIN ONE YEAR."

7. ACCORDING TO THE "BANGKOK WORLD" OF FEBRUARY 28, NEW FORCE PARTY DEPUTY LEADER DR. PRASAN THANCHAI SAID AMERICAN TROOPS ARE NOT NECESSARY FOR THAILAND NOW, AND BESIDES THEIR PRESENCE IS ILLEGAL. IF ANY FOREIGN TROOPS ARE ALLOWED TO STAY IN THAILAND IN THE FUTURE, PRASAN SAID THE GOVERNMENT DECISION SHOULD HAVE APPROVAL FROM PARLIAMENT.

8. SEVERAL THAI-LANGUAGE NEWSPAPERS HAVE SHARPLY CRITICIZED THE SENI CABINET'S POSITION ON THE U.S. MILITARY PRESENCE IN RECENT DAYS. A "PRACHATHIPATAI" EDITORIAL ON FEBRUARY 25 SAYS THE MAJORITY OF THE THAI PEOPLE WANT THE U. S. TROOPS TO LEAVE, THE U. S. PRESENCE GUARANTEES CONTINUED WAR, AND ANY GOVERNMENT WHICH DEPENDS ON FOREIGN TROOPS IS NOT A GOVERNMENT OF THE PEOPLE. "SIANG MAI" EDITORIALS ON FEBRUARY 26, AND 27 CRITICIZE SENI AND THAWIT FOR SAYING THAILAND CAN'T TELL THE AMERICANS TO LEAVE BECAUSE THEY WERE INVITED TO COME TO THAILAND. THE NEWSPAPER ARGUES
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THAT ONLY A FEW THAI MILITARY LEADERS INVITED THE AMERICAN TROOPS WITHOUT THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE THAI PEOPLE. A "SIANG PUANG CHON" EDITORIAL ON FEBRUARY 26 ASKS RHETORICALLY: " DOESN'T SENI REALIZE THAT THE PRESENCE OF U.S. TROOPS IN THAILAND WILL LEAD TO WAR FOR THIS NATION? CAN'T HE SEE WHAT IS HAPPENING IN VIETNAM AND CAMBODIA?"

9. COMMENT: THIS GOVERNMENT STANCE CREATES OBVIOUS DIFFICULTIES FOR OUT MILITARY POSTURE IN INDOCHINA. IF THE DECISION GETS CARRIED OUT, IT WOULD AT LEAST PERMIT AMERICANS TROOPS TO REMAIN THROUGH THE END OF THE NEXT DRY SEASON. THERE IS ALWAYS THE POSSIBILITY THAT SENI, ONCE THE ASSEMBLY CONFIRMS HIS GOVERNMENT, COULD LATER MODERATE HIS REPORTED POSITION ON THE U.S. PRESENCE.

10. IF SENI SURVIVES THE MANDATORY VOTE OF CONFIDENCE BY
THE PARLIAMENT, HIS SUCCESS MAY IN PART BE DUE TO HIS
HAVING SET A DATE FOR A COMPLETE U.S. TROOP WITH-
DRAWLS. IF HE SURVIVES ONLY A FEW MONTHS THEREAFTER, WE
COULD WELL TAKE THE BLAME FOR OVERTHROWING HIM ON THE SUS-
PICION THAT WE ENGINEERED HIS DOWNFALL BECAUSE HE INTENDS
TO EXPELL THE U.S. MILITARY.
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